

After decade-long search for site, cohousing advocates set to build in Fair Oaks



View of Entry to Fair Oaks EcoHousing

Architecture by McCamant & Durrett c. 2014

The Sacramento Bee, April 21, 2015. By Cathy Locke clocke@sacbee.com

Cohousing advocates whose development proposals were thwarted by community opposition in Orangevale and Folsom have finally found a home and a warm reception in Fair Oaks.

The Sacramento County Planning Commission earlier this month approved Fair Oaks EcoHousing's plans to build 30 residential units and a 3,800-square-foot clubhouse on 3.7 acres bordered by Fair Oaks Boulevard and New York Avenue.



“At the hearing, no one showed up in opposition,” said Marty Maskall, a future resident and project manager for Fair Oaks EcoHousing.

Maskall said the group nearly bought the property in 2005, but the deal fell apart over the price. In the years that followed, they pursued sites on Illinois Avenue near Greenback Lane in Orangevale and one near Folsom’s historic district. Plans for both sites were scuttled due to community opposition.

Then Maskall said, a friend with the Fair Oaks Chamber of Commerce informed her that the Fair Oaks property was for sale and neighbors saw a cohousing development, with owner-occupied homes, as a welcome alternative to a possible apartment complex, with rental units.

“I think it’s going to refresh this neighborhood,” said Siobhan Miura, who lives around the corner from the property. Miura, 49, said she was so impressed with the plans and the cohousing concept that she decided to invest some of her retirement savings in the project, although she doesn’t plan to live there.

The cohousing concept originated in Denmark during the 1970s. Residents own their homes and share ownership of community features, such as a clubhouse with kitchen and guest rooms, a swimming pool and grounds, which in Fair Oaks will include a garden and orchard. The developments typically feature environmentally friendly designs, including solar energy and water-saving features. They aim to foster a sense of community. Residents take turns preparing group dinners three or four times a week and share their skills to manage and maintain the common facilities.

Charles Durrett, a Nevada City-based architect who learned about cohousing as a student in Copenhagen in the 1980s, is credited with bringing the concept to the United States. A resident of a cohousing community in Nevada County, he has designed about 50 such projects nationwide, including Fair Oaks EcoHousing.

Cohousing communities, he said, allow residents to create their own neighborhood, because they are the developers.

Fair Oaks EcoHousing will be the second co-housing development in Sacramento County and the first in the county’s suburban area. Southside Park Cohousing in downtown Sacramento features 25 homes.

Maskall said 11 households are committed to Fair Oaks EcoHousing so far, and 20 are needed to obtain financing. Now that the project has the County’s approval, she expects that number will be quickly reached. Most of those who have signed on to date are couples or singles, Maskall said, but the group is reaching out to families as well. Construction is expected to begin early next year, with move-in anticipated in early 2017.

Fair Oaks EcoHousing will feature 12 flats and 18 townhouses, with units ranging in size from 934-square-foot, two-bedroom, one-bath flats, to 1,726-square-foot townhomes with four bedrooms and two baths. The homes are not inexpensive. Maskall said they likely will range in price from \$300,000 to \$500,000, depending on the square footage and floor plan. Monthly homeowner association dues typically are \$300 to \$400, she said, depending on the services that are included, such as wireless and water.

Roslyn Eliaser, a retired police officer currently living in Carmichael, is among those committed to the Fair Oaks project. She describes herself as a child of the 1950s and '60s with a college major in environmental studies. She worked as a park ranger before pursuing a law enforcement career in Sonoma County.

“It’s a place to age gracefully,” Eliaser, 63, said of what she envisions as an intergenerational cohousing community. “You can have as much sharing or privacy as you desire. That’s what is very attractive to me.”

Some people have a misconception of cohousing – “They think we’re this weird hippy commune,” Eliaser said. Those who have signed up for Fair Oaks EcoHousing, she said, are a group of professional people, including a retired Aerojet scientist, nurses, teachers and counselors.

Although security was not Eliaser’s main reason for choosing cohousing, she noted that neighborhoods where residents watch out for each other tend to be the safest. “This is like the ultimate Neighborhood Watch program,” she said.

Bob Oyafuso, 74, of Folsom said he was drawn to cohousing because it offers security and social contact. His wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease four years ago and now requires 24-hour care.

With a close-knit group of neighbors, Oyafuso said, he can ask someone to keep an eye on his wife if he needs to run an errand, and group meals mean there are times he won’t have to worry about cooking.

“Her quality of life depends largely on how she interacts with people,” Oyafuso said of his wife. “She can’t read a book for entertainment or watch a movie.”

In a cohousing environment, he said, if she sits on her porch, people will come talk to her and give her a hug. Oyafuso said he looks forward to moving into the Fair Oaks EcoHousing community “because I know my neighbors will greet her with love.”

A tour of the Fair Oaks EcoHousing site will be offered Saturday. Those wishing to participate are advised to meet at 10:30 a.m. at the Fair Oaks Coffeehouse, 10223 Fair Oaks Blvd., in Fair Oaks Village. To sign up for the tour, call Linda Tanforan at (916) 359-3742. For more information, see the Fair Oaks EcoHousing website, fairoaksecohousing.org.

Call The Bee’s Cathy Locke, (916) 321-5287.

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